

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The prudent see danger and take refuge (Prov. 27:12a).

Children are a blessing from God, and He calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a safe and blessed place for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

However, since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen within our fellowship, but we are committed to taking reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. This commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- We do not allow anyone to work unsupervised with our youth (children or teenagers), unless he or she has regularly attended Calvary Memorial Church and is a formal member.¹
- We require all those who work with our youth (children or teenagers) to complete a detailed application and we will provide a screening process (including background checks).
- Our goal is to have teams of two or more working with our youth and to work in visibly observable settings.

If a child is harmed in Calvary Memorial Church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold the offending person responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

¹ The only exemption from this “formal membership rule” is the children of established members under 18 who have demonstrated faithful ability and will work along side adult members in an assisting role.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete
in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

All Christians struggle with sin and its effect on our lives and our relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and when needed, from church leaders (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, we encourage believers to seek counsel from each other and confess sins to one another.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. As Christians counsel one another, we should treat each other with respect and courtesy, and avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity (Eph. 5:3). Therefore, we will be willing to seek counsel with at least two believers when it is appropriate to protect from unwarranted accusation and any appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). In cases where confidential information is shared, we will not try to compel those counseling us to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge the confidential information in a way that will be used for selfish or personal gains (Prov. 11:13, 25:9).

There will be times when it will be necessary for church leaders to become involved in the counseling process. Since our leaders often do not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling, they will give priority to people who have formally joined the church (Gal. 6:10).

COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

*A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man
keeps a secret (Prov. 11:13).*

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 26:20), invites confession (Prov. 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all members and adherents are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as is possible, there are times when it is biblically necessary or appropriate to reveal certain information to others in the process of helping people, such as in the following circumstances:

- When a counselor is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from the leadership of Calvary Memorial Church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Prov. 11:14).
- When it is believed that the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12).
- When a Christian refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20).
- When the leadership is required by law to report behavior that is against the law (Rom. 13:1).

To be clear, the intent in divulging any information is to help, never to harm.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that He sent His Son to die for her as Christ's bride, and is continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 19:7).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). So it helps us to confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic, or harsh, as modern society often does. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those He loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man You discipline, O LORD, the man You teach from Your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a God-honoring family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This process, sometimes called "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship, and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

God's discipline, as in a family with growing children, may also have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, He corrects us. One way He does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back to the path of godliness. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is always to be administered in humility and love, with the goal of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and who lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who attempt to bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so that they can play a piece properly. We applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they err so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in His Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to helping one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal, and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to change and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another

day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13). This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within Calvary Memorial Church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his or her sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, withholding the Lord's Supper, removing from office, withdrawing of normal fellowship, and, as a last resort, removing from membership and church attendance (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior. This step may include close friends, a small group, a Sunday school class, or the entire congregation if leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then leaders may formally remove him or her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to treat the individual as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat him or her as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to them, remind them of God's holiness and mercy, and call them to repent and put their faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

We realize that our natural human response to correction is often to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen Calvary Memorial Church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is in process. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be made effective until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If an individual leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and leaders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from their sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents, and leaders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

Where known, people who have been excluded from another church because of church discipline issues will not be allowed to partake of the ordinances, become members, or participate in the regular fellowship of Calvary Memorial Church, until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, **or** until such time as our leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.